

# The Edge of the UnderDark

## Cover Sheet

Adventure by Paul Schmidt

1st Frost '99 - ???

### Player Characters

Sabrina	Namer	Elf/Valkyre	Female	Leader
Turf	Namer	Elf	Male	
Naiden	Necromancer	Human	Male	
Scratch	???	Human	Male	
Adam Vychan-Jones	Earth	Giant	Male	
Basalic	Earth	Human	Male	Scribe
Flamis	Fire	Human	Female	
Kryan	Illusionist	Human	Male	
Neroc	Necromancer	Human	Male	

**Plane** - Greyhawk

### Places visited

Greyhawk City

Gnome city in the UnderDark

Iren-Kithic - Drow city in the Underdark

The Skillet - Efeeti town in the Plane of Elemental Fire

City on the surface that had been taken over by the drow

City of Midrick

**Employer** - Cuculein

### Major NPCs encountered

Lord Ebonhand

Shriek - a goblin

Matriarch of House Melshak

Lawfakir

Dr Stephanopolois

Trusty Jack

**Mission** - Find out what the drow's plans are for the surface.

# Edge of the Underdark

## Summary

1<sup>st</sup> Frost '99 - Day 1

Spent 26 days at the Guild having potions and scrolls done

27<sup>th</sup> Frost - Day 27

Went to Greyhawk City

1<sup>st</sup> Snow - Day 31

Reached entrance to Underdark. Encountered trolls in mushroom forest.

5<sup>th</sup> Snow - Day 35

Encountered and defeated large beholder. Obtained it's treasure

6<sup>th</sup> Snow - Day 36

Found large underground city, ex-dwarven, now populated by undead. One end contained two magical pillars which kept the undead away from that section. They are also an Earth place of power. Here resides an old red dragon on a large treasure pile. Nearby is a lava stream which is a fire place of power.

10<sup>th</sup> Snow - Day 40

Finally left the old city and encountered petch who told us how to get to the gnome city. On the way we reached a starway down a cliff. The minerals there distorted earth magics.

11<sup>th</sup> Snow - Day 41

Reached the gnome city. Stayed with the gnomes for some time while new spells were learnt and some training done.

12<sup>th</sup> Ice - Day 72

Left the gnome city with the plan to find a drow trading party and hijack them.

14<sup>th</sup> Ice - Day 74

Reached a kua-toa trading post. Various trading parties are here, including illithids, human, and drow.

15<sup>th</sup> Ice - Day 75

Go after one of the drow parties. Attacked by illithid on a rock bridge over a lava stream. Later on, we got directions from a bunch of duager riding giant spiders.

17<sup>th</sup> Ice - Day 77

Ambush drow party who are members of House Tormentor in the drow city. Have to fight off a summoned demon.

19<sup>th</sup> Ice - Day 79

Reach the city of fire giants located on the shores of a lava sea. Cross the sea and encounter an efreeti who wants a fire opal retrieved from the drow city. On the other side of the sea was an old male drow wizard who helped us maintain our drow illusions and also gave us stones that would help us speak drow. He also wants the House Matriarh of House Tormentor slain.

### 22<sup>nd</sup> Ice - Day 82

Arrived at a drow settlement where we obtained a goblin called Shriek. Stayed there overnight.

### 23<sup>rd</sup> Ice - Day 83

Bought two gnomes off a drow trading party. Later on, reached drow guardhouse and managed to pass through into the city. While we were there, we achieved the following:

- captured the steward of House Tormentor
- fought and defeated the house wizard of House Tormentor
- looted the House Tormentor vaults
- captured the Matriarch of House Tormentor
- captured the Matriarch of House Melshak (a rival house)
- looted the House Melshak vaults.

The House Melshak Matriarch was released and the House Tormentor Matriarch turned over to her. In the Melshak vaults was the fire opal the efreeti was looking for. We also discovered that the drow are using a large orray in the centre of the captured surface city to change the conditions at the surface to match those of the Underdark. The vaults contained notes and a model of the orray.

### 29<sup>th</sup> Ice - Day 89

Returned to the shore of the lava sea where the wizard and steward were released. The fire opal was turned over to the efreet. In return he conveyed the party to The Skillet where we were healed and rested.

### Candlemas - Day 91

Arrived back at the gnome city and used a summoned xorn to reach the surface. Two party members had to be retrieved from an evil temple near the surface. Had an interview with the regent of the area. It was his city that the drow had captured. Currently there was a dark dome over it that was slowly expanding.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Thaw - Day 94

Arrived in Greyhawk city and reported to the Wizard Lawfakir. Discovered how the orray worked.

### 5<sup>th</sup> Thaw - Day 96

Back to the regent and organised an army to invade the city once the dome was brought down.

### 9<sup>th</sup> Thaw - Day 100

Entered the domed city and made our way towards the centre. City populated by drow, formorian giants, and undead.

### 10<sup>th</sup> Thaw - Day 101

Reached the centre where the giant orray was. Had a large battle with drow and formorians. Sunlight spells were used to cause the orray to fade away and the dome to vanish. It is believed that the orray is still present and may reappear someday. The secret to permanently destroying it is said to lie in the underground dwarvish city which is directly below.

### 12<sup>th</sup> Thaw - Day 103

Returned to Greyhawk City and thence to the Guild.

# Edge of the UnderDark

## Basalic

It was the day of the Guild Meeting but before the actual meeting itself that Flamis was approached by Adam-Jones. The party he was in was in the plane of Greyhawk and were investigating some incidents with drow. They were after some extra firepower. Since they were likely to be going underground, an Earth mage with reasonable ranks in Tunnelling would be useful. So Flamis and I agreed to join them.

We didn't leave immediately though. One of their party, Axis Dragonmage, was unable to continue owing to other commitments this session but there was enough time for him to put useful spells onto scrolls for us. So we ended up with 8 Rank 13 Quickness scrolls, 10 Rank 16 Enhance Enchants, and 6 Rank 6 Opening spells. All this took 26 days and cost 20,000sp. Sabrina put the money up front. She also borrowed Axis' crystal ball.

During this time we were briefed on what was going on. The party had been employed by the paladin, Cuculain. About seven years ago, the drow had been behind an uprising by the giants. The giants moved into elven lands while the drow attacked the capital city and surrounded it with some sort of dome. The elves fled the city. Meanwhile the giants infested the countryside but were beaten back. A few were still about causing trouble. The reason the giants were beaten back was because of a special race of orcs who were dedicated to liberate people from oppression. They had special abilities such as harder blows, cannot be disarmed, and form weapons out of nothing. At the moment they're against the drow.

Our job was to find out what the drow were up to and give them a good 'cleansing'. The drow are skilled fighters and use poison. They don't like the light, use magic as talents, and most of them are pacted. The principle Colleges are necro, mind and celestial. Their society is matriachial and any battle with them is likely to be 'difficult'.

The original party had already gone down the entrance where the fire giants had arrived from and had reached the bottom. Down there was a doorway leading to a temple and the entrance to the drow levels. The only treasure left down there was too dangerous to get at. The party had ran into trouble at the temple and had to return to be de-cursed.

27th Frost

Finally made our way over to Greyhawk City. Once there, Flamis tried a Flamesight ritual. The first attempt produced the image of a desert, while the second was an image of a corner of a drow city in a cavern. She then tried her Contact Other Selves ritual. To our surprise there seemed to be two of them about. One was definitely malignant and the other 50/50.

Spent a few days looking around Greyhawk City.

1st Snow

Set off towards the entrance to the UnderDark, through the entranceway that the fire giants had come out of. It took four days to get there.

4th Snow

Reached the entrance and headed down to the point where the party had already been. A wall was

placed over the entrance to the temple and we carefully went through the double doors and into the lower levels. A ward on the other side was bypassed but, strangely, it seemed to slip around the counterspell.

The walls of the passage were granite with embedded pyrites. A faint reddish glow could be detected ahead. As we progressed there were limestone deposits appearing but they didn't seem to be natural. Soon we could see the lava flow ahead and the path continued on alongside it.

Two hours later the rock was mostly flowstone and there were more steps. The surface was also rougher and also more slick. Finally we reached a huge cavern containing several fungi and toadstools with eight or nine other entrances. I looked for tracks and detected several that were troll. It appeared that they were harvesting the fungi. Scratch went hunting and found three trolls. It looked like they were 'spaced out' from the effects of the mushrooms. One was snoring in the stream. The other two followed Scratch back to where we were.

Scratch slipped and the troll leapt at him. Sabrina and Adam charged in. Adam head-butted one troll and knocked it over. Meanwhile Flamis hosed the other one with dragonflames. Finally we managed to dispatch both of them.

The poisons were purged from the remaining troll and he was put under a charm. He knows where the drow are but their caverns were a long way from here. They don't trade with the drow preferring to stay out of their way. Their troll village is on the way but it is possible to go around although both of the alternate routes are more dangerous. One goes near a dragon and the other he wasn't sure about. All that went down there never came back.

Finally we found a small defensible cavern to heal up and rest.

.2.

### 5th Snow

We followed the troll in order to bypass the village, going the way that no one had returned from. A while later we reached an area of flowstone that was more artificial with scalloped walls and artificially joined pillars. It was soon established that those pillars were hollow but, without breaking one open, it was impossible to determine what was inside. No magic was detected.

An hour later we reached a large flowstone cavern. Flowstone steps led down into it and another set went up from the other end. In the centre was a large sinkhole at least 100ft deep. A slight cold airflow was flowing down into it.

We made our way down by rope. Unfortunately Adam slipped. He would have made a large dent in the floor but, he was able to shrink himself into a cage which Scratch was able to catch. The troll was allowed to return to his village.

Down below it was a mixture of granite and flowstone. Everything was scalloped and smooth. Five tunnels ran off from this area. We headed down one. The tunnel twisted and turned as well as getting smaller, much to Adam's discomfort. Finally he hopped back in his cage.

At the end we found a single pillar and two uncut emeralds in the wall. I estimated they were worth several hundred silver pennies. However it was decided to leave them alone in case it was a trap.

The other tunnels were found to be identical except there were no gemstones or they had been removed. There seemed no other way out of here until a crack in the floor was discovered. Inside we discovered a space with three trolls inside and they weren't happy. Shortly we found the stopper over the hole. I created a tunnel down to the chamber and the trolls panicked. One of them was ripped to pieces. Sabrina managed to calm them down and discovered that they are afraid of 'it', a large round creature.

Just as we got the trolls out, we saw a light floating above. Then a note floated down with just one word on it 'Surrender'. One of the fleeing trolls fell over with its head missing. Also Naiden started stripping, obviously charmed in some way. The rest of us backed off into one of the tunnels, just as a 12' diameter beholder floated down into view. It was a much bigger one than the one I had heard about from Aqualina and probably much more powerful.

What followed was one of the strangest battles I had ever witnessed. Sabrina cast several counterspells on herself then charged out on Ajax. Meanwhile Scratch rendered Naiden unconscious. He then joined the fray by having Adam throw him towards the beholder.

No spells would work in the anti-magic field so it was down to range weapons, even though it was well out of suitable arrow range. However, somehow, both Scratch and Sabrina were able to attack it with their weapons even though they weren't in range. Turned out that they had acquired some strange items that allowed them to attack from outside the time stream. Scratch then sailed past the beholder and landed on the edge of the sinkhole above. His hump was beginning to melt from the beholder's disintegrate ray.

As Sabrina and Ajax closed with it, it fired beam after beam from its eyestalks at them which they were resisting. Adam launched Turf at it. The beholder turned its attacks onto Turf but Turf was very resistant. Turf then landed on the beholder and took out its anti-magic eye before being knocked off, landing on the ground near Scratch.

The beholder aimed its disintegrate beam upwards and carved a hole in the ceiling. We could hear the sound of rushing water from above. Sabrina attacked it again and it bit back. Meanwhile Flamis started climbing the walls of the hole, with a tiny statue of Adam, as the water started pouring in. I followed, carrying Naiden.

Just then the beholder, looking rather battered by now, went thin and wispy and headed for the hole. Sabrina hit it with a mattock but it disappeared up the flow of water. She then used a special dagger to remove the charm from Naiden.

Sabrina - "I'm suffering from Beholder Interruptus"

Finally the water stopped flowing. Scratch sent a Wizards Eye up to have a look and discovered the beholder was holding back the incoming flow with a Wall of Force. The cavern it was in used to be a large lake surrounded by a pebble beach. On the beach was a pillar of rusty metal with a magical aura. Remains of healing potion vials were scattered nearby.

We tunnelled our way in, emerging on the beach. Two Quickness scrolls were used on us and a good thing too. Suddenly two large snake-like monsters, GTN: Behir, erupted from beneath the pebbles, one on either side of our group. One blasted us with lightning, the other missed. Sabrina went to attack but, as it tried to coil itself around her it was stricken by arthritis. The other behir

went for Scratch and was also stricken as it attempted to curl around him. I managed to score some good hits on the one around Sabrina while she extricated herself. Then a wound appeared on Ajax. The partially regenerated beholder had decided to join in the fight.

.3.

The only place that the beholder could be was one of the holes on the far wall. Unfortunately there were so many holes that the entire wall looked like a certain variety of cheese. My instructions were to try and locate the beholder so I drank my last ten point potion in order to recover some of the damage I had taken. Meanwhile the behir were starting to back off after being dragonflamed and pummelled.

I decided to take a guess and cast the widest Tunnel possible at a random spot in the wall. It was very serendipitous that a rather surprised beholder was revealed. Turf tried to leap on Ajax to join in the charge but Ajax stepped sideways. As Sabrina charged in a scroll floated in front of the beholder that was being rapidly read. It suddenly vanished but reappeared above the lake, flying backwards. Then, it dropped out of the sky and into the lake. A short while later the water in that area started boiling and a message appeared on a rock near the shore. It wanted to negotiate.

We decided to allow this. As it appeared above the water, I checked it's aura and discovered it was innately honourable. It offered us our lives and its own. It didn't have any maps but could describe a path to the drow city. It also believes that the nearby red dragon is dangerous. It has a small treasure pile, which we could make use of, and promised not to harm us directly or indirectly for at least ten years.

So we had a look at the treasure and retrieved the useful items. I went for a set of drow half-plate armour. The rest of it consisted of troll bits, rotting food, clothing and some other stuff. Scratch also removed the horn off the dead behir. Some of the others want to have a go at the dragon but finally conclude that is too foolhardy.

6th Snow

Rested nearby then headed off towards the dragon's lair in order to have a quick look. The tunnel we were in appeared to have been carved out of the rock by the beholder and was just wider than it was. Partway along was a niche where some healing potions rested. Scratch took them. The tunnel then widened, presumably to allow the beholder to turn around. Beyond that the tunnel went uphill before stopping at a dead end. Here, the rock wall was very thin and a couple of peepholes were drilled. Beyond the thin wall was a large cavern. A reddish glow, presumably lava, was at the other end. The edge of a dragon's tail could be seen on a basalt ledge in front of the flow.

Flamis said that the place felt like a fire place of power however, when we tried to DA into the cavern, we couldn't. There was an anti-magic sphere in the place centred on the dragon. So we decided to pull out and leave the dragon alone.

I have no idea how the next encounter came to be as I was sure we had retraced our steps. But, somehow, we found a room off the tunnel that had not been there before. It contained a broken chair and table and, beyond the closed door, a flight of steps lead downwards. Scratch attempted to locate the beholder but couldn't.

Beyond the stairs was an open area that was definitely dwarven and very old. This chamber was 60' across with elaborate stonework cut into it. Arrowslits were carved high on the walls, presumably designed to allow archers to fire on anything in the chamber. Flamis sensed a fire place of power nearby while Naiden detected quite a lot of undead including some greater undead. Scratch used a Wizard Eye to look further down the chamber and saw an identical set of stairs on the far end and two ramps on both sides going up to recessed gates. Undead were pressed against the gate to the left.

From what Sabrina and Turf could establish, there were dragon wards all over the place which were shifting reality making us think we were moving away from the dragon's lair when we were actually going around it. The others described it as some sort of convergence effect. Adam tried looking through the nearby wall and the view kept changing.

So we pressed on, making sure we were roped together. Finally we emerged in what appeared to be an underground dwarven city. A red glow could be seen to one side. We could walk away from the glow but then we heard scraping sounds from all sides, except for that direction. All we could do was to head towards the glow otherwise we would have been facing hordes of undead. Also, in that direction, both Adam and I could feel an Earth place of power.

The undead consisted of a mixture of ghouls, wights, spectres, etc. Nearly all of them were dwarvish in origin and all looked as if they were struggling uphill if they headed towards the glow and the dragon. So we headed off in that direction.

Finally we saw the red dragon but it had a peculiar sheen to it and it was very still. Just then we realised it was a statue. The statue was magical with the nature being protection against horrors, presumably a virulent form of undead. Nearby were two intact buildings and two very large electric blue coloured iron pillars. Around them the ground was moving. This was the Earth place of power. Behind the buildings came a scratching and crumping sound. This was the real red dragon, shifting on its large pile of treasure. Also we could see the cavern where we had originally looked in, through a one-way transparency.

The dragon we decided to leave alone. Instead we went for the buildings. One of them had the symbol of the Tree of Life - a symbol of White Necromancy. A necromantic ward was in the doorway but that was quickly bypassed. Inside were several books, written in ancient dwarvish. Most were crumbling but at least one was preserved and, as far as we could tell, had to do with the anti-undead branch of necromantic magic. The other building was empty.

Afterwards Turf made stew. Just as he finished the job, heavy footsteps were heard marking the arrival of the dragon. It polished off the stew then emitted a flame burp, thanks to the chili Flamis had put in it. We then killed the draft horse Sabrina had 'stored' and the dragon dipped it in the lava stream before consuming it. Finally it wandered back to its treasure.

Near the fire place of power, the lava, Flamis did a Flamesight ritual to determine the way out. What she saw was a large set of bronze doors, not very far from here, located somewhere beyond the dragon.

Naiden thinks it'll take a week just to peruse the book and at least a month to learn the spells

within it. However the others are rather leery of taking the book out of the chamber in case the dragon objects. Fortunately it doesn't have any reaction to Naiden studying it. While he's doing that the others examine the bronze doors. They have several runes carved into them which generates an anti-horror field. The protection would break briefly when the doors are open.

So Flamis does a pre-cog vision on what would happen. She saw the doors open into a large open space and, as we leave, the dragon patters over and sniffs at us. Since we've reached the center of what was causing the convergence magic, the pillars, then we shouldn't have any trouble leaving. After some discussion it is decided to stay here for a while to give Naiden time to assess the book.

#### 7th Snow

During the day the dragon wandered over and looked at Turf expectantly. So Turf and Flamis made more soup which the dragon ate with gusto. After finishing that it was still hungry. So they tried feeding it an old suit of plate mail. It ate that too. Fortunately Sabrina had a large pile of stuff, most of which that was on the ex-pack horse so we managed to satisfy its hunger. It would repeat this performance at least once a day.

#### 9th Snow

Finally Naiden announced that the book was worth studying so we decided to try and leave. The dragon sniffed at us as left but made no move to impede us. Scratch opened the doors but, as we tried to exit, the dragon blocked Turf's progress then nudged him towards the kitchen. So Turf prepared a large meal which used most of our supplies.

Flamis - "You realise I'll have to get more tandoorii. I've nearly run out"

Basalic - (grins) "Oh goody!"

While it enjoyed the meal we made a break for it. Just after we closed the door there was the sound of scratching then silence. Scratch was convinced that was a polymorphed cat.

So we continued down the passage heading south. A while later we reached a stream which was flowing in via another northbound passage. We followed the stream until we found a place to camp. While we set up someone noticed that there was a purpleish tinge to the mana.

#### 10th Snow

We progressed on. By late afternoon the stream had enlarged into a brook as we entered an enormous cavern. Light was provided by glowing fungi on the walls and roof and the stream, along with several others, poured into a large crevasse in the floor. Several pillars ran from floor to ceiling. Naiden could hear a regular tapping sound so Scratch sneaked ahead to investigate.

A short while later, he returned and motioned us onwards. We discovered a group of small humanoid creatures - GTN: Petch. They told us that they trade with the gnomes and they don't like the drow. The drow city is an extremely long way from here but they travel all over the place. The gnomes live down the hole. There is also a different, and much larger beholder, lurking somewhere further on in the maze of tunnels down there. The gnomes don't like the drow either. So we got directions to the gnome city.

The petch told us that we were to cross the crevasse then travel down a stairway to the passages to the gnome city. The crevasse was 50ft wide. While the others argued over how to get across,

I threw a rope over and lassoed a stalactite. We then used the rope to cross. It then took us another twenty-five minutes to reach the stairs.

They were steep, narrow, and went straight down for 300ft. They then zig-zagged down the side of a 500ft high cliff. Soon we reached a gap in the stairs. So Adam and I created Walls of Stone to bridge the gap. To our surprise, the walls extruded from the cliff face instead of just appearing. So we DAed them. The duration was permanent and there was a brownish tinge to the mana in addition to the purple. So Adam decided to try an experiment and, with his permission, he put a Trollskin on Scratch. Immediately Scratch began to grow. We immediately came to the conclusion he was turning into a troll, both physically and mentally, especially when he tried to attack me just because I was the nearest one. Scratch then jumped off the wall.

Sabrina flew after him on Ajax while Turf used shadowwings to follow. The rest of us continued down the stairs. A short while later we encountered another gap. Again Adam and I attempted to create Walls. Unfortunately my spell went awry and I turned into a statue. Adam had to carry me down the stairs.

Meanwhile Sabrina and Turf landed near where Scratch had impacted. At this stage he was a splattered mass of organic tissue that was slowly coalescing. Any healing potions he had, including the Waters of Healing I lent him, were smashed and absorbed into him. While Turf continued to help heal Scratch, Sabrina flew back up to see how we were doing.

Finally the entire group was on the floor. There used to be a necromantic ward here but it was now dissipated. There was no brown in the aura, just purple. Sabrina was able to dissipate my petrification but several bits of rock were still stuck in my body. I could have them removed but, according to Turf, they meant I was in permanent contact with Earth.

Once Scratch was totally regenerated and the trollskin had worn off, we camped.

### 11th Snow

Nearly five hours into our trip and the surrounding rock was now mostly basaltic and the walls were warmer. When someone drew mana, flecks in the rock glowed. When I looked I saw an interesting purpleish mineral. So I picked up some loose rocks.

A while later a voice said "Who are you". When we identified ourselves and why we had come, a section of the wall slid away and half a dozen gnomes were revealed. One was a full earth mage, the others had a mixture of earth and illusionist magics, probably intrinsic to the species. We told them that we were looking for information to help bring about the downfall of the drow.

Finally we were taken to the gnome city which was basically caves built into the caverns. The streets were marked with different gems for identification. Scratch wanted valuations of each one. Finally we were taken to their Council. We told them that our cover story was that we were trading in hallucinogens but we were here to find out what the drow were up to. The drow have somewhere between 15 to 24 trading houses. The traders were the least homicidal and perverted of the bunch. If we were to pose as part of a trading house we would have to stay in certain areas and wear the badge. Even that wouldn't keep us out of trouble. Besides trading only occurs at trading areas and one of the largest ones was nearly two weeks travel away. Only the junior branch members travel. Another interesting point was that trading drops off when the drow are 'up to something' and that happened recently.

The drow city was located several weeks away to the northeast and has an estimated population of 2,000 drow and 18,000 slaves. Some drow have attacked on driders, a cross between drow and spider. Also the drow are raising vampires which have difficulty in going gaseous.

The gnomes had created continual light pebbles that only go out when removed from underground. Also their crossbow bolts were hollow tipped made of fragile gems. They can be filled with poison gas or some black vicious anti-drow stuff that is created from a mushroom race called myconids.

I asked about the minerals and were told that they interfered with conjuring/summoning magics but enhanced everything else. They turn into haematite when taken above ground. Crystals of it grow near the drow city.

The wall that the stairs are on is saturated with earthblood which enhances earth magics.

Down further from the drow is a race locally known as illithids and seems to be the local branch of the Calimar. They usually keep to themselves.

There's a pool of aquatic 'fishmen' on the way to the drow. They may or may not attack depending on their current whim.

It was decided to stay with the drow for a period of a month to allow some of the party to learn new spells, including Naiden and Flamis. Adam had earlier obtained a piece of the 'Oarth Stone'. When the gnomes found out about that they insisted that he hand it over. After some argument, he did. During our stay I spent much of the time exploring the local area and sampling the local brew which turned out to be very strong. On the fourth day several gnomes were missing and 'waves' causing distortion of distance were passing through. On the third week the gnomes had managed to create a portal to the Elemental Plane of Earth. That was what they needed the Oarth Stone for. The portal was marked by a whirlpool in the wall.

.5.

During our time in the gnome village, Turf did a summoning and another Guild adventurer joined our ranks. This was Kryan the Illusionist. Kryan demonstrated his abilities and when he put Scratch inside a maze spell, Scratch discovered he was on a place called the Border Ethereal. To us he was invisible, but Scratch could dimly see us as if through a thick curtain and everything was reduced to shades of grey.

Sabrina tried to generate a doorway that would take us home. A multicoloured door did appear that lead us onto the Astral Plane. Fortunately it was two way. The Astral Plane basically consists of a bright, well-lit, greyness that extends in all directions. The only thing that relieved the greyness were distant spots of colour. Once through the doorway, we discovered we were floating and we could travel in whatever direction we wanted just by thinking about it.

The other feature that was immediately noticeable was what looked like a large tree rising from below and disappearing far above. Kryan tried to send an illusionary animal to investigate but became possessed by something. Fortunately it was easily dispelled. Meanwhile Naiden and Sabrina went to investigate.

They discovered it was something called Yggdrasil, otherwise known as the World-Tree. Adam thought this was extremely interesting and decided to nibble at the bark. Immediately he was beset by one of the Tree's guardians who thought Adam was a Frost Giant from a place called Jotenheim who was attempting to kill the Tree by ringbarking it. Fortunately owing to some quick fast-talking, combat was averted and we retreated back through Sabrina's door.

Lots of plotting and planning went on. Flamis suggested we enter the city as "out of town drow". Turf speaks drow very well. Scratch and Naiden are the only other two that have even a smattering of the language.

Finally the plan is hatched to hijack a drow trading team.

12th Ice.

Finally the month is up and we are ready to go. The gnome leader gives us all reduce potions which we all drank which allowed us to take shortcuts through some rather small tunnels. That was hard work as they twisted all over the place. Down here it was all igneous rocks.

14th Ice

Reached a river which had a jetty sticking into it. There was also a very bad smell around the place. Just then some kuo-toa boatmen arrived and charged us 200sp to take us to the village down the river. They seemed quite insane.

On the way down a water troll was spotted but the boatmen zapped it away. Finally we disembarked and walked down a tunnel that was green and had fish carved on it.

Finally, at the top of a waterfall, we found the kuo-toa. Naiden used a communications spell to speak to one and discovered it wants to trade. We had reached a trading area and there were drow present, a few illithids - a species related to the Calimar, and a bunch of human adventurers wearing illusions. The kuo-toa were definitely in charge here.

Before being allowed to enter we were given a piece of special coral each and told to pay homage at the shrine of their deity. So we had to kneel at the shrine. Some of the drow were a bit too slow and they were grabbed by the kuo-toa and fed to the statue.

We discovered that the drow parties were suspicious of the human party who looked like human priests of Neuril. Also the illithids were here to buy slaves to eat. Apparently they consume the very spirits.

Later, we discreetly spoke to the human party and discovered they were also here to buy slaves in order to save them from the illithids. We were also told to watch out for the kuo-toa.

The drow parties are from different cities. One group of 18 is from the drow city of Iren-Kithic - the one we're trying to reach. The coral was divinated and was discovered to set off an alarm when the cleft behind the shrine was entered. They also allowed us to be easily located.

Scratch did some trading with the kuo-toa. Some hallucinogenic drugs for green pearls.

## 15th Ice

One of the human party was actually an elf by the name of Lord Ebonhand and he decided to come with us for a while. He had an item that would allow him to return to his party should the need arise.

That morning, when we awoke, we discovered that four drow had been murdered in their sleep and the other two in that group were missing. The kuo-toa were already carrying off the bodies. Naiden was able to speak to their spirits and discovered it was that group of 18 drow which had since left and these drow were killed three hours ago. Just then the spirit was pulled to the statue.

Another group of 12 were from Malzac-Yang and they had one priestess with them. The group of 18 had at least two and, despite the greater danger, it was decided to go and catch them. As we left we had to return the coral pieces.

Two hours later, we were out of the kuo-toan carved area and the tunnels got rougher. Another two hours later and it started getting warm. Kryan put drow illusions on us at this point. Another half hour and we could see lava reflected light. The tunnel forked and a Locate indicated that the drow had headed towards the lava river. So we followed.

A rock bridge crossed the river and Scratch and I went first to check it out. Suddenly it looked like Scratch went over the side. Turned out it was an illusionary bridge. I tried tossing a rope to Scratch but missed. Just then what appeared to be an African Elephant appeared in the lava and Scratch bounced back onto the shore.

At the back of the party, something wet and slimy attacked Naiden and some magical effect stole my wits. It turned out to be an illithid and one of it's head tentacles had already bored a hole in Naiden's head. Already Naiden had begun to fade. Sabrina lanced it in the eye and the tentacles were ripped out while Ebonhand lit up the entire area.

Levitating blobs of lava flew at us but Kryan sent them to the Border Etherial. As we heard a mental chuckle, Flamis blasted the area with Dragonflames.

A short while later we found the illithid's blood trail. But after a short while, the drops of green ichor changed to a trail of red blood. Finally we found a partially burnt form in the lava - a human with a missing brain. Decoyed!

So we exited the area. I recovered after another twenty minutes and was vowing revenge on that illithid. Just then another presence was detected as a passenger in me. Cleansing flame didn't remove it but one of Turf's circles did.

Naiden and Scratch went around the corner and saw a shuffling humanoid. It was an elf which had it's face ripped open. Flamis blasted it and it dropped. As it fell glistening fluid leaked out which was flammable. It was later identified as psychokinetic fluid. Some charred items dropped off but when one was DAed, it exploded. Turned out that the Locate had been pointing to that charred stick. So we started heading back the way we had come.

A while later, Turf heard advancing feet. Soon a spider, five foot across, carrying a dwarf scuttled around the corner. Kryan used a Maze spell and the spider vanished, causing the dwarf to tumble to the ground. He wasn't too pleased as he pulled out his battleaxe and advanced.

"Where's my spider?" - Dwarf (GTN: Duager)

"Obviously a phase spider" - Naiden

More duager on spiders arrived. They were a large trading group of thirty plus. Their leader, a duager in plate mail, riding a phase spider, came forward. He told us that they were trading in hallucinogenic mushrooms.

Sabrina wanted to know if they had seen the drow group. Unfortunately that information came with a cost - 15,000sp to be exact. Once Sabrina paid them, they told us that they had seen a group of 20+ drow heading towards the city. Most of the group were drow, including a couple of priestesses, but they had seen two illithids with them as well. Another 5,000sp paid and we were told of a shortcut.

As we were heading off sounds from behind told us that they were dropping the tunnels.

Several hours later we stopped to camp.

#### 16th Ice

After a great deal of walking we found a crack in the basalt wall. A High Celestial ward was just inside the entrance. It was activated by evil or evil intent. We risked it and the only thing that happened was small electrical discharges as Scratch went through.

At the other side was a sandy area. A similar gap was on the other side. Off to one side was a limestone pyramid with creatures wandering about. The creatures were soon revealed to be large silvery golems. One came over and told us to be gone. So we went through the other crack. An identical ward was on the other side. Once through we found ourselves in a narrow, unused crack. So we stopped and camped.

#### 17th Ice

Finally reached the main tunnel after passing through a very narrow gap for 160 odd feet. This tunnel was 30ft wide and the last thing had come through a couple of days ago. Just down further the tunnel split and a third tunnel entered from an upper level.

Kryan sent out an illusionary bat and it reported a drow caravan approaching which was 2 1/2 hours away by batflight. So we planned our ambush. Ebonhand suggested Earth Transformation spells. Pity Adam and I don't know it. But if they start teaching it at the Guild, I might just learn it.

.7.

As part of our preparations, Turf tried to summon another adventurer. He succeeded, and Neroc, a necromancer, appeared but Turf disappeared, presumably back to the Guild. Meanwhile Flamis was laying fire wards, mostly along the roof.

The three potions of Magic Resistance were drunk by Neroc, Flamis and Adam while the two Potions of Restoration were drunk by Neroc and Flamis. A Mind Special was cast on everyone except Flamis and Neroc who had a Necro Special on while standing in a Mind Special area. Kryan cast Invisibilities and an Illusionary Terrain for us to hide behind.

After a while, a scraping sound came from down the tunnel and an animated flying skeletal bat with glowing red eyes, flapped into view. It searched around the tunnels then returned. A few minutes later it was back. This time it was followed by two drow mounted on large lizards. We presumed they were advance scouts. They seemed suspicious but carried on. Someone DAed them and discovered that they were in mental communication with the rest of the caravan. One of them was a Mind Mage and the other was a Necromancer. Both of them had Mind Counters on.

Five minutes later, there was more noise and six drow in lizardback arrived followed by pack animals, followed by two groups of another half dozen mounted drow. After the first group went past we struck.

As Sabrina charged, Kryan used an Illusionary Orchestra to play appropriate music. 'Ride of the Valkyrie' he called it. The caravan was 120ft long and there were no sign of illusions. Meanwhile both Quickness scrolls were read as Ebonhand and Flamis lit up the area. At that the drow started screaming.

Suddenly Ebonhand fell over as his lightning bolt backfired and shorted out on him. Neroc threw a Necrosis and three drow dropped down.

"There's nothing like the smell of necrosis in the morning" - Neroc

Dragonflames washed over them. Adam and Sabrina charged in with Naiden following. Adam head-butted a drow priestess and sent her flying down the corridor. I gave Ebon my Resist Pain potion so he could shake off the effects of the lightning bolt. More dragonflames and more necrosis caused more drow to fall and another priestess went flying.

By now the drow were recovering from their surprise and started to counter-attack. Some of them also became Quickened. There were more priestesses as well as one tried a Necrosis. A drow on a lizard hit Neroc with a black tipped lance that glowed purple on contact. Another also hit Flamis. Then an Agony dropped. It seemed to affect the drow in our group more than us but it was still debilitating. Another drow mage used dragonflames. Still another used some sort of Word and that slowed some of us down, including me, even more.

One of the lizard's disappeared under a priestess causing her to fall unceremoniously to the ground. The other lizards panicked and some of them ran onto the roof, triggering the fire wards. This resulted in bits of cooked lizard raining down on the combatants. One bit bounced off Sabrina.

The last surviving priestess raised her staff and broke it. Both ends began glowing and an image formed between the two bits. It was identified as a fire demon and while Flamis shockbolted the priestess Naiden and Adam grabbed half a staff each. But, instead of putting the two bits together, they flung the halves away in opposite directions. Now nothing was left to stop the demon from stepping through the portal.

Its first act was to grab the stunned priestess and eat her. It self-immolated and reached out towards Sabrina but grabbed Ajax and started pulling him in. Ajax fought back. Also the demon was visibly glowing as it tossed Sabrina and Ajax about the place. It then swung at Naiden before eating a fallen drow which helped it regenerate the damage it had taken. Naiden was grabbed and

his right arm ripped off and consumed. It probably would have eaten the rest of him had not Adam hit it. So the demon dropped Naiden and head-butted Adam.

We noticed a greenish light starting to glow just down the corridor. It was another portal and another demon was starting to come out of it. The first demon drop-kicked Adam before going for Ebon and attempting to bite his head off. Ebonhand was able to deflect this and in doing so, knocked a tooth out. Meanwhile Sabrina and Ajax hammered in, knocking it flying and causing it to drop Ebonhand.

Sabrina then went for her last ditch weapon, a bag controlling a Darksphere and sent it at the demon. A mental tussle started for control of it. Sabrina managed to distract it long enough for her to cast a Mind Special banishment at the materializing demon causing it to vanish. The demon was then further distracted by stepping on Scratch but the darksphere stopped short of the demon's head. So Scratch decided to climb the demon's leg as the darksphere swung towards Ajax.

Flamis tried an Extinguish which only caused the demon's flames to flicker momentarily. As Adam bowled it over, all the slowness effects dropped off and the rest of us were able to act. I tried to hit it but missed. As the darksphere plowed into the ground then shot down the corridor, Neroc ran up to it and slapped a skinchange on it. It turned momentarily into a frog but then managed to change into a frog shaped demon - GTN: Slaad. It leapt at Kryan, missed, but got Scratch with it's sticky tongue so Sabrina severed it. Scratch put the tongue in his pocket. I managed to hit it with my sword but ended up with the slaad on top of me.

It tried to negotiate a truce and threatened to throw me in the nearby hovering darksphere. Demons are notorious for not keeping their word so the rest of the party continued the attack. I was about to try and stick my sword in it's underside when I was flung towards the darksphere. Adam managed to catch me but not before my bottom half was sliced off. Well that's enough to kill anybody.

It didn't take much more effort to finally defeat the demon and Sabrina had to calm a hysterical Flamis. They then checked the bodies. There were some magical items, some hallucinogenics plus other mundane items. Two illithids were also going through the gear while traversing the Border Etherial. Shortly they faded away.

.8.

The party retreated, without Lord Ebonhand. He had mysteriously disappeared while things were being sorted out. Some sort of contingency thing. Scratch tried to locate him but didn't have much success. Naiden had a trump card to summon him back if necessary. They could also talk to him so they tried it. All they got some sort of friendly contact but no response, which implied that he was unconscious. They did detect some healing power on the other side of the trump, so someone did a precog to see if I could be restored by it. The prognosis was promising.

The party used the darksphere to carve out a new tunnel then put up illusions to hide the hole. The battle area was cleaned up and made to appear as if a beholder had been here. Naiden decides to enter the trump with various potions and me.

It seemed to work. No sign of Lord Ebonhand though. We seemed to be in some sort of dark area - a room with a black heart in it. I was resurrected and regenerated but more as a rocky thing then

became more human. Even after that I still felt rather solid. Naiden then did something and we reappeared with the rest of the party. Flamis nearly smothered me with her enthusiastic hug.

Naiden seemed to pacted now to Helios, who has just awoken. Meanwhile my willpower, according to Sabrina's divination, is higher in some respects and lower in others. The Greater is still going and other spells are still going at maximum efficiency, including a Rank 20 firearmour. Sabrina is annoyed because her Compel Obedience won't work anymore. There was only one person who could succeed in compelling me. I jokingly stated that it was Flamis but it turned out to be Naiden.

We rested for the night. During the time, we reasserted the rings. Well it seemed like a very good idea to be even though some of the rest of the party disagreed. Once we had completed we discovered that Flamis also had those willpower effects. Weird.

#### 18th Ice.

Neroc questioned the spirits of the dead drow and discovered the following. They trade with the city occasionally and usually meet with members of the trading guild. We got their House name, House Torturer. Enemy houses are the House of Driser and the House of Asterie while an allied house is House Melshak whom they were selling drowbane too. Do I sense an upcoming civil war? All the symbols for the houses were obtained so we could recognise them. Dangers are usually raids by other houses, mindflayer raids and the odd other encounter i.e. beholders.

Entry protocols and passwords were also obtained. We would have to pass through a drow outpost which would examine us extremely thoroughly by magic. Once we were hopefully cleared they would supply us with passes to the city itself where we would have to pass more guards. Being on the lower level of the city is ok but being on the plateau area behind it is instant death unless you've got a really good excuse.

Finally we set off, under illusions etc. Even an Earth elemental was disguised as a lizard to help carry the drow trade-goods, mostly phase-spider silk. This day's journey is all downhill through basaltic tunnels. Finally we stopped and camped.

#### 19th Ice

More marching and a lot more downhill. Near the end of the day there's a reddish light and an airflow. Soon we saw smoke drifting near the tunnel roof. Also the tunnel was getting much wider until it expanded into a chasm. This area looked like it had been worked. Finally we saw a sea of lava, stretching away for as far as the eye could see. A set of giant sized steps led down to giant sized constructions, a city of fire giants. A waterfront had been built along the lava edge.

Flamis was feeling the area to be a fire place of power so she dumped heat proofings on us all. We could see fire giants going about their business in the city including pushing rocks along the lava sea.

Once into the settlement we could see mostly giants but there were a few drow here whom the giants seemed subservient to. Also enslaved were some gnomes and dwarfs. Scratch was our best speaker in the drow language so he discussed with one of the drow, the possibility of hiring a boat to get us across the lava sea. I could see that the boats were made out of pumice and were shaped like barges.

We were charged the equivalent of 5 true-silver guineas each and a fire giant, named Thog, was obtained to propel the boat, especially when the drow found out that our 'firegiant' wasn't there for that sort of work. He believed that what was required was a good thrashing and was very keen to show Scratch a special giant thrasher. So Scratch finally looked inside the building indicated and his hair turned instantly white. From what he was saying we got the impression that there were hundreds of thrashing tentacles inside.

The punt that we climbed into was 30ft long and 15ft wide. Thog wanted Adam to help push but Adam made the excuse that he couldn't unless his mistress (Sabrina) ordered him to. So Thog called Adam a 'nancy-boy' and threw a glob of lava which dribbled down Adam's breastplate.

Finally we punted off. Thog said that it would be a 6 hour trip so I took a nap. A while later, a shower of piercers fell on us. One dropped onto the boat onto Neroc. After a bit of a struggle we finally managed to get it off him. I decided to retrieve the teeth as they were very sharp. I used one of my 20pt potions to heal Neroc which he paid back with one of his.

A short while later Thog suddenly disappeared under the lava. At the same time we could see a lava whirlpool ahead. So Adam started punting while Sabrina took off on Ajax to tow us out of the way.

Someone had been making comments about sharks and, would you believe it, we saw fins in the lava. Immature land sharks according to their aura. There were six of them with one being larger than the others. Flamis threw an extinguish on the area which slowed them down for a while. It was then we noticed there were small brass tags on the fins. The bigger shark dived under the boat. In the process it ripped the bottom and lava oozed in. However, Flamis used her gloves to patch the hole.

When it looked like we were going to be safe, the whirlpool moved to block our path again. Just then we detected something much larger than human ahead of us and invisible. When it realised it had been detected, it became visible. It was an efeti and those sharks were its pets. The reason that the sharks had attacked the giant was that Thog had been rude to the efeti in the past.

The efeti then looked suspiciously at some of the party, especially Scratch as he smelt of jann, the enemies of the efeti. Scratch managed to explain the situation while planting a shadow of doubt in the efeti's shadow. The efeti believed that we should take the opportunity to strike back at them for what they had done. Also he wanted us to come with him to the City of Brass.

Sabrina managed to explain that we were on a special mission to the drow city but would consider his offer afterwards. The efeti then stated that it was not a coincidence that we had met. Inside House Melshak was a special fire opal that had once belonged to the jann and the efeti wanted us to go and get it. To help us, he conjured a vision of it. It was teardrop shaped and burned with an internal flame. It was also highly magical however it won't burn anyone pacted to the Power of Fire. A firemage might be enough. He also gave us a scroll that would transport us to a place called the 'Skillet' which is a safe trading place. Talk about 'out of the frying pan into the fire'. However we had to be outside the drow city to use it. As a reward he told us that he had access to several tomes of power. Kryan was especially interested in some 'light' reading.

So, once we had agreed to do this, he clapped his hands and we moved rapidly across the lava to the far side.

On the way over Sabrina wanted to know if the efreeti was able to give us the ability to speak drow. He replied that he could but he wanted us to do something for him, specifically Flamis. It transpired that he wanted her Gloves of Shaping in exchange for spell knowledge. Flamis declined.

More fire giants were working on the other side. One of them told us it was another three days to the drow city.

A short while later we encountered an old male drow who, according to his aura, was a combination of an Air/Fire mage and his highest ranked spell was something called Incendiary Cloud. Even though we were under illusionary disguises we greeted us with the phrase, "Greetings, elves and humans in disguise". It turned out he had been contacted by the efreeti. He told us he could do business with us. In exchange for his help, he wanted us to remove the head off a certain drow priestess. Further questioning told us that her name was Ellisath and she was the head of House Tormenter. The reason he wanted her dead was simple revenge. We didn't have to bring the head back as he had contacts that would tell him the news.

He also told us that our illusions could decay at unexpected times because of the concentrations of the magical crystal around the city. I decided to ditch the samples I was carrying. I could always get more on the way out. However he could give us something that could stop the degradation.

He could also teach us drow but the method used involved crystals that stored the words spoken by dead companions. To demonstrate he called over a fire giant. While holding a gem in one hand he sliced open the throat of the fire giant with an air sharpened scimitar with the other. Somehow the gem captured all the words the giant had spoken. When Sabrina put the gem under her tongue she discovered she could speak fire giant.

Naiden - "That's putting words in your mouth".

It would take a day to prepare enough gems for our use, from the souls of his dead compatriots so we had to wait.

#### 20th Ice

The old drow finally arrived with a collection of gems of assorted sizes, one for each of us. We were told each one contained a finite number of words and the gems would shrink as they are used. So Sabrina ended up with the largest one while I took the smallest. Scratch refused one but I took it as a spare, just in case.

He also had bracelets that would protect our illusions from degradation. We took them but, after we left him, Sabrina divinated one. College was Earth mixed with Dimensional Weaving, they contain some earth from the Abyss, and the durations ranged from 7 to 15 days. Even when not in use we discovered that the duration left decreased slightly.

#### 22nd Ice

Two days later we reached a section of tunnels that had been worked. Also the mana around here was earth tainted. By the end of the day we could see lights ahead.

This area was a veritable web of caverns and we had come out on a ledge. It looked over a large space where lots of tunnels met. Down here was a cavern full of glowing fungi. Figures could be seen moving between the stalks. It looked like they had been laid out according to a plan. Among the fungi were buildings.

Just then, approaching our location, we could see a couple of drow, several lizards, and what looked like very large goblins. These turned out to be troglodytes. Looked like a cross between goblins and stone giants. One of the drow was a fire mage, the other was mind. They offered us hospitality and we were shown to an empty house. As we got there, we could see miniature cattle grazing among the fungi.

Once inside we settled down to rest and purify. A short while later a goblin came in wanting to know if we wanted refreshments. Naiden requested fruit. The goblin looked very worried as he scurried off.

Fairly soon, one of the drow arrived, and told us that the 'entertainment' would be starting soon and would we like to watch. So we were taken to a viewing platform overlooking a large hole. At the bottom was the edge of a lake and several trees bearing strange fruits. A bunch of goblins were down there, some harvesting the fruit, while another lot were watching the water cautiously wielding spears.

Abruptly a mass of tentacles erupted from the water and attacked the goblins. It was instant pandemonium. The surviving goblins grabbed the fruit baskets and frantically climbed the ropes. To stay in character, several members of our party started making bets on how many would make it. Most of them were plucked off, but one goblin, the one that had come in earlier, was racing up the rope with tentacles close behind. Naiden, surreptitiously, used a Spectral Hand in order to assist him.

Scratch decided he wanted the goblin, whose name was Shriek, and asked for him on behalf of his mistress, Sister Lash - Inquisitor of the Holy Order. He was actually referring to Sabrina. Our drow host introduced himself as Shauman and he was in his thirtieth year in the Warrior College.

So Naiden got his strange fruit, which had the generic true name of Liethiu. I cautiously nibbled on a bit. The drow had also provided wine to go with the meal they provided. The wine must have had a magical effect as our perception range temporarily increased.

23rd Ice

Next morning we discovered that the fruit had an aftereffect. I had aged a year. Fortunately the effects had ceased. After breakfast and purification we headed off.

The caverns we were travelling through were definitely more worked. We also had that goblin with us and we discovered he was resistant to charms and compels as well as having a propensity to learning languages.

A couple of hours later and we reached an intersection. There, we met up with another drow caravan containing 8 drow, three minotaurs, some goblins and a couple of gnomes. We didn't recognise the house badge which was a single blue sword. However the badges were magical enhancing tracking skills.

We were told that one of the gnomes was a gem-smith so Scratch negotiated the purchase of both gnomes before allowing that caravan to get well ahead of us.

At midday we reached a drow fortification which blocked the tunnel ahead. Lots more of that mana crystal was about and there was an opalescent sheen to the rock walls. It looked like rock to mud magic had been used to shape the tunnels. Also the mana level was rising and there was a black taint to it.

Finally we reached the guard post and joined the queue of travellers wishing to gain admittance. By now Sabrina had put Mind Counters on those who needed it.

The queue zigzagged over glowing ground and our bracelets also started glowing. Jusat as well we had them or our illusions would definitely had dropped off. The area that was not being stood on was warded with Sinking Dooms and Rock to Mud spells.

As we got closer we studied the two drow at the admittance desk, located at the entrance of the fortification. One was wielding a wand while the other was taking details with a pen. That drow also had a piercing blue eye which granted him true vision. Both of them were Mind Mages and the ebony wand detected enemies. The pen also had divenerative magics on it and as far as we could make out, it was able to determine the person's common name. So Scratch handed out some excuses.

Somehow we got through all of this without incident and collected the parchments we would need to enter the city. Beyond the fortification, the cavern opened up very wide. Large barracks were on either side. Shriek knew the way and, two hours later, we had reached the city.

The city resided at one end of a very large cavern which looked like it had stars twinkling in the roof. The rest of the cavern was occupied by fields which were being worked by goblins and troglodytes. The city was about two miles across and fairy lights sparkled in the towers. It was built on two levels with the lower, outer, level surrounding a plateau. Goblins were patrolling the city walls armed with a variety of weapons.

The city gates were open and, after presenting our papers, we went in. There were several spider motifs on the walls and buildings, some of which were worked in with an image of a beautiful woman. Lots of foot traffic scurried around the place, mostly slaves. Both our necromancers were feeling a bit ill as they could feel the consecrated ground over most of the plateau.

Finally we reached an inn-like house. Scratch put a Wizard Eye inside and saw some duager working there. Since they had the ability to see through illusions he told the proprietor that 'the mistress wanted them removed'. So that's what happened. The place was also warded against anyone not wearing a House Tormentor badge. Most of the wards were Hellfires.

We had a few hours to ourselves so we settled in. The roof had gargoyles on it - and I don't mean the stone statues. I suspected these ones could be animated. Also I talked to the gnome gem-smith and discovered he was at least Rank 7. There's probably a lot of stuff I could learn from this gentleman.

After that few hours, a gong went off and a 7' tall drow arrived, accompanied by half a dozen guards. He was carrying a holster of wands and introduced himself as the House Wizard of

House Tormentor. He was here to greet us, see what we had to trade, and invite the ladies, and their retainers, up to the main House for dinner that evening. According to his aura he was non-colleged but the three wands he was carrying were foci, one for fire, another for lightning and the third for necromancy. The guards were carrying both long and short swords.

Scratch showed off what we had to trade, mostly the green pearls and the hallucinogens then, after he left, we discussed what to do. The rest of the party was in favour of using the drowbane to poison the food and use the confusion to kill the matriarch as well as hopefully pinning the blame on House Melshak. Personally I wasn't very happy with the idea of poison as it seems rather dishonourable. However, not having any better ideas I kept mostly quiet.

.10.

Neroc - "I'm a free thinker. Me myself and I. That's three isn't it?"

About a couple of hours later, the steward arrived, accompanied by six guards. Four of them remained downstairs while the other two followed him up. As he entered the room he hesitated as if he saw something suspicious. Scratch was already waiting behind the door and immediately attacked from behind while Kryan dropped a flash of light. Naiden attacked one of the guards who immediately dropped. I helped do the other one. The steward was going for some sort of recall item before he fell. Since all the guards were death aspected we made sure they weren't going to die before securing them. Kryan then cloaked Scratch with the illusion of the steward and Scratch went down to fetch the other four guards. They came up and also looked suspicious but a flurry of attacks, Flamis's pyrotechnics and Neroc's necrosis soon dealt to them. Neroc then asked Shriek to provide us with a mop and bucket to clean up the mess.

All the guards swords and armour were magic but the only magical item on the steward was the recall device which had been last used 8 years ago. Sabrina compels the steward and the two remaining guards. Just then the steward's body went limp. He had poisoned himself with a fake tooth. So Flamis used Cleansing Flames to remove the poison. A more complete search revealed needles under the fingernails and a garrote in his hair. Scratch pulled on a rubber glove with the intent of doing a body cavity search and quite a few other objects dropped off. The reason we were making sure that he stayed alive was that he had a death curse. We weren't sure what it was but it had something to do with the House.

Under the effects of the Compel, the steward was questioned. He was due back in an hour and the keys to the building were kept in his room. So we obtained the building layout. There are 48 people in the house and he reports to the chief wizard, named Ordon who knows all colleges and is pacted to Orcus. He's immune to compels, fire spells, and necrosis. Also he has a special divination room in the house which he uses to do divinations on guests.

Also there is a quasit familiar, which knows the Death College, in his room which he can communicate with at range. However it's not his. It was planted on him by Ordin and would betray him in an instant and would immediately know he was compelled when he came within it's range. He has managed to secrete items in his room that will kill it. All we had to do was to set alight a special parchment. He's pacted to someone called Yeenoughu and his ambition is to breed gnoll/drow hybrids. Scratch referred to them as 'sick puppies'.

He has his own quasit which is probably less trustworthy than the other one but at least he has control over it. Currently it was outside. As proof, he had it come in. It was a mana creature,

knew the Fire College, and came from the Abyss. This quasit he wanted kept alive.

The Matriarch is into Compel and Geas magic and would close the city if the steward didn't return. Apparently she's vulnerable to salt but since food is always tasted first and they're all carrying anti-venom rings, poisoning them wouldn't be much of an option.

He refused to help us with the way out as, if he told us, he'd die. It's some sort of nobility secret. Also there are enchanted golems built into the walls and spiderweb traps in the outer walls. Inside the vaults are bound demons which can only be controlled by Ordin and the Matriarch. The whole building is enchanted to prevent tunnelling, flying, conjurations etc. Hellfire wards are scattered about and the building is within a high mana zone. Plus there are the vargals. They look like winged heads and there are fifty of them. Usually they're kept in the aviary. The only way to go in an out safely is to swear an oath to a noble. This also had the effect that attacking house members causes less damage and also the resistance against their spells is lowered. Proper hand signals and passwords are required. Of course we obtained all of those. He also believed House Melshak is even better protected.

The steward is keen to take down House Tormentor or become the house leader. However, since he's the lowest in the pecking order, this would be nearly impossible. Everyone has a Death Curse and the males are bound to the House. Anyone associated with the death of a noble is magically marked. The other nobles are the Matriarch, her three daughters, Ordin and two other mages. All of them travel with at least a six guard entourage.

All he knew about the drow's master plan was that quite a few Houses were involved in bettering the Goddess's goals. They had been busy constructing some sort of device. Probably Ordin or the Matriarch would know more. The plan would probably take years and lately they had gained a new ally that scared even the Matriarch. It was a tall, thin man who carried a cane. Scratch identified him as the Gaunt Man and told us that this person is extremely nasty with a capital N.

It is decided that Scratch, Naiden, and Kryan are the ones to take out the quasit while the rest of us wait outside. So we headed up to the house, suitably disguised. Scratch is disguised as the steward.

We manage to get inside the house after giving the appropriate passwords to the guards. Hanging over the doorway is one of those flying heads, GTN Watcher, activated by non-drow.

Our destination was the second floor. Once there we found the steward's door barred and locked. There was also a telepathy ward on the door. Naiden dropped a mind special counter and Scratch opened the door. The steward told us that the parchment was under the orray but the quasit leaped out at Scratch before Scratch could get it. Fortunately Flamis was able to see a corner of the parchment so she pyrogenesised it. The quasit caught on fire. She then shock-bolted it while Scratch stabbed it and it died.

We all met up again in the hallway outside after Sabrina brought the real steward in. Another flight of stairs brought us to an area that was more stonework. Our objective now was to get the house wizard and the steward led us to a door. When we knocked the door drifted open revealing a very thin animated cadaver. We knew that only one person could cross the room into the wizard's summoning chamber, where the steward said he would be, so Scratch went first. Meanwhile Naiden triggered a Quickness on everyone except Flamis, myself and Neroc.

We soon determined that the cadaver man was in mental communication with the wizard. At the other end of the entrance room, Scratch had to enter the summoning room alone as the cadaver man was staying several feet behind. Also only one living person, including the mage, could be in this room at once. There was poison on the door handle as well.

When he finally got through, he noticed that there was a pentagram between him and the wizard. His illusion immediately dropped off and the cadaver man came up behind him drawing a fletcherette. So Scratch charged and was immediately consumed in a pillar of green flame which fortunately did no damage. The mage fumbled his teleport device and dropped it. Scratch then discovered that Ordin was immune to drowbane. The cadaver man used his fletcherette and carved Scratch's hump off.

Meanwhile we were figuring a way to get through. The only safe way was to be conducted by the cadaver man. So Naiden knocked on the door and Kryan created an illusion of the cadaver man. That did the trick so Sabrina went through with Ajax, and Adam in goat form, to help. Once they were through, Sabrina threw the 'goat of doom' at the mage. In mid flight, it turned back into the giant. Meanwhile Scratch was banged aside and knocked into the summoning circle where something invisible attacked him.

The wizard was knocked to the ground and frantically scabbled for his teleport device. While Adam stepped on him, Scratch escaped from the circle and grabbed the device. He then activated the one he had and managed to fuse both of them together as well as turning himself two dimensional. Meanwhile Sabrina attacked the cadaver man. She ended up being blinded.

Naiden was the next one through preparing a petit mort. However, something caused the lower halves of both Scratch and the wizard to vanish. So Naiden used the petit mort on Scratch to save his life, before dodging a column of acidic green flame. The wizard was regenerating and Naiden was starting to feel dizzy.

Neroc was the next one through just as Adam threw the cadaver man in the circle to fight the invisible thing inside. Naiden was hit by green fire and fell over.

"Always good to have a spare necromancer" - Kryan

Flamis was next. By now the mage had blasted Adam and Sabrina released Ajax to fight the mage. Unfortunately Ajax was partially in the circle so was vulnerable to the invisible thing. From what we could percieve it was something with too many horns and claws. Flamis blasted the cadaverman with fire and found it was highly flammable. The fletcherette also caught on fire.

Flamis then grabbed the magical cage and tried to get the still regenerating mage to go in it. The first attempt failed, so did the second but, on the third, the mage was sucked in. Ajax was looking in bad shape by now so Adam plowed in to help while Flamis hit it with fire. A couple of blasts and it was down. She then used cleansing flame on those who were poisoned. For some reason, Neroc seemed to enjoy the spell effects as he was rolling around in ecstasy. Meanwhile I gave Naiden a 20pt healing potion.

Now that we had the mage in a cage where he can't do things to us, we started pumping him for information. The plot on the surface is led by House Melshak but the fire opal is not part of it. Apparently they're trying to produce the same conditions on the surface that exists in the

Underdark.

.11.

We retreated back to the steward's room. Once there we discovered that Ordin was carrying a rod of cancellation and a wand that spits acid. Ordin wants to bargain but we think he's not to be trusted. As Sabrina discovered that Ordin is not compellable, Kryan renewed our illusions.

We want a deal for certain physical requirements (regenerations), assistance to achieve our objectives, and to obtain more information about what is happening topside. He wants House Melshak dealt to and, since he can't return here, to be released in a place of mutual choosing and we won't harm him, however he doesn't want Scratch anywhere near him. He also wants the steward dead and a share of the treasure in the vaults. He has a few items in mind, mostly ones generated by the forces of darkness such as an Amulet of the Planes. He wants to loot this place, loot House Melshak, leave the area, go to a mutually agreed place within a week of leaving the Underdark, to release him under oath not to attack Scratch for a week, the rest of us for six months. Also either Naiden or Sabrina was to carry the cage.

So we took a blood oath on that before heading for the vaults as there is an item that can do the regenerations. The Matriarch, otherwise known as the Reverent Mother, can also regenerate.

The vaults were three levels down and, on the way there, we had to pass through several wards, which Ordin neutralised by touching them, through a secret panel in the basement, a pit trap, and several guards some drow, some fire giants. One of the giants was guarding a door that needed his strength to open.

We passed through the cells. Down there was what looked like a troll/drow cross. He was the torturer and his GTN was a mess - literally. Spiral stairs led down to iron lined cells where special prisoners were kept. The last cell had a secret door in the wall which revealed another spiral staircase. Down here were voice commanded iron golem guards and more wards.

Finally we reached the silver coated vault door. Ordin told us there was a devil on the other side. On the other side was a multi-coloured lattice pattern and he warned us not to step in certain colours and items needed to be removed in a certain order. There was a secret way out that led into the city.

Once we looted the place we started along the exit tunnel. Along the way we found two sets of armour, and emergency food rations. Both sets were poisoned and one belonged to Ordin. The other was the matriarch's set. So we let him have his armour and he used two regeneration scrolls to fix Scratch and Sabrina.

A bit further down we holed up. Scratch was worried that the Gaunt Man was going to drop a dimthread. This would allow him and his army to enter this plane and invade it.

Ordin told us that House Malshak also has psionics and that there are wards down here that only he and the matriarch know about. Some of them can only be set off by the head of the household and are used for signalling.

.12.

After quite a bit of discussion, it is decided to lure the Matriarch down here as well. So Naiden was disguised as Ordin. He then attempted to petit mort the steward but, to our surprise, the steward turned into a black widow spider. We eventually trapped it inside my pewter beer mug and Flamis sealed the end.

Once we were invisible, and holed up in a Flamis carved alcove, Ordin activated the summoning ward and a short while a female voice asked "What do you want?" Naiden told her that he suspected that the House had been infiltrated. Apparently she had done some divinations and had become aware of the same thing. Unfortunately no one had thought of casting witchsight on us all, or no one had the ability, as she was effectively invisible. Naiden could tell she had a staff in one hand and a mace in the other.

We figured we'd have to take her down quickly so it was basically a case of as many people leap on her as possible. Adam was thrown at her first then those that could, leapt in. Unfortunately Neroc missed - and grabbed Sabrina.

She also had one of those teleport devices but Naiden managed to wrestle it off her. Finally, with everyone attacking, she went limp and called a truce.

When interrogated she told us that she didn't know what was going on but the Reverent Mother from House Melshak would. Also she would like nothing better but to see that house go down.

We stripped her of her magical items except for an amulet which allows her to enter the special meeting place of Reverent Mothers, known as the Thane. Without it, she would be transformed into a drider upon entry. The next scheduled meeting wasn't for five days but she could summon the Melshak Reverent Mother there and could also let us into the Thane. There were also guardians there, a mixture of cindermen, gargoyles etc. Her invisibility was a Reverent Mother talent.

We were finally convinced to enter into a blood oath with the matriarch then she led us to a secret entrance in the tunnel wall. On the other side was a large open space, 150ft wide with an altar at the far end. A large spider painting with an attractive female head was on the wall behind it.

We were scattered around the room as we didn't know where the Melshak matriarch would appear. Also, we had to immediately knock her off her arrival point in order to stop her from teleporting back.

Suddenly she appeared in the room and Adam was the closest. Everyone charged in on her. Adam missed but Naiden was able to knock her down and subdue her. Just then we felt that the Tormentor Matriarch was about to break the blood oath. Kryan stopped her before she could do so.

Both Reverent Mothers were removed from the Thane and all the items removed. The Melshak reverent mother offered us the contents of the Melshak house treasury for her freedom so we took it. Their treasury was guarded by quicksilver golems and drow guards.

Among the treasure was a bunch of papers detailing the drow plans. Flamis found the fire opal. The Malshak Matriarch wanted the Tormentor Matriarch and agreed to sign a receipt.

During the skirmish with the Tormentor Matriarch, I had been struck by some sort of poison curse. The only way to keep me alive was for Naiden to use petit mort. Immediately I turned into a large spider and spent the rest of the trip in a pewter mug.

#### 29th Ice

Arrived back at the lava sea where the wizard and steward were released. The efreeti was summoned and the fire opal handed over. In return, we were transported to a town floating in the Elemental Plane of Fire where my curse was removed and everyone healed up and rested.

#### Candlemas

Arrived back at the gnome city where Adam got his stone back.

.13.

Turf was back. Apparently he had been summoned somewhere as well. Also, from what he had been saying, his summoning of Neroc had been a backfire as he was aiming for someone else.

We were looking for a quick way back to the surface so the gnomes summoned a xorn, a creature that could move through solid rock, and we used it to get back up near the surface. The closest we could get was the other side of those large double doors near that evil temple at the entrance. The ward by the door was divinated and was an earth based ward with the college of chaos. Kryan created an illusionary gorilla which stepped on the ward and disappeared down a hole.

Neroc had a teleport item so a crystal of vision was used to examine the other side. He then tried to teleport us all through. When we appeared we were blasted by fire. Must have been a fire ward there. It was then we realized that both Scratch and Shriek were missing. We looked everywhere except in the temple area and couldn't find them.

That meant that they were in the evil temple, the last place we wanted to look. Last time a party had been in there, they had their eyes ripped out. So we went in cautiously.

The temple was a large room with drifting purple globes near the ceiling that provided light, evil looking frescos on the walls and a glowing black altar at the far end. Slumped over the altar was Shriek. Behind it was Scratch. Both had their eyes removed and replaced by a grape like bunch of eyeballs hanging out of the sockets. We tried to leave with the bodies but some of us felt a compulsion to stay near the altar. Plus they began sinking to the ground. Application of holy water to the altar managed to aid us in getting all our companions out, as tentacles crawled from the ground in order to snare us. Once we were out I put a Wall of Stone across the entrance.

Finally we regained the surface. The black dome could be seen about 30 miles away. It was slowly enlarging. Flamis used Wildfire to get us all to the nearest town, Extera, where we went to report to the regent. While we waited we went to a nearby inn where the innkeeper, Trusty Jack, treated us to a round of drinks. An orc arrived to pick a fight with Trusty but Naiden petit morted the orc which turned into a statue.

Once the regent was free we reported what we had found. In the Melshak treasury was a model orray and documents showed that the cause of the dome was due to a larger version of it located somewhere in the middle of the city. It was built around a dark sphere and the effect was to change the conditions inside the dome to that of the Underdark. The boundary created a distance

distortion effect that prevented entry. The way to stop this was to destroy the orray.

#### 1st Thaw

We headed off to Midrick where some powerful healers were who may know what to do about Scratch and Shriek. It took us a day and a half to get there by Wildfire.

#### 2nd Thaw

Arrived at Midrick, a city built of limestone, and went to the main church where the healers did what they could for Scratch and Shriek. Unfortunately they couldn't do anything about the eyes but they did recommend someone back in Greyhawk City who has had some success with such cases, a Dr Stephanopolis.

#### 3rd Thaw

Portalled through to the Temple of Raoul in Greyhawk City then go visit Stephanopolis. Turns out he's a bit of an experimentalist, like Dr Fran-N-Stein back on Alusia but seems to know what he is doing. Meanwhile the rest of us go and report to Lawfakir. When Lawfakir found out what had happened he immediately went to rescue Scratch and ensure that the job is done properly. Scratch returns with two normal looking eyes but Shriek has apparently decided to keep his eyeball clusters.

Lawfakir - "Do you serve the Forces of Good?"

Neroc - "Certainly. I'm a member of the Adventurer's Guild"

Lawfakir knew about that red dragon in the city below. According to him, it had gone senile.

We spend the night researching the orray model. It also has a tiny darksphere inside it and can be manipulated to generate the same effect as the large one. Merging the two areas of effect should allow us to penetrate the dome.

#### 4th Thaw

Neroc and Turf go and visit the priests of Celestron in order to get some Sunlight scrolls. They are referred to a priest who runs an orphanage and return with two.

#### 5th Thaw

Arrive back at Extera and tell the prince what the plan was and request an army to attack the city as soon as the dome vanishes. It will take five days for this to be set up. Turf is also presented with a special sword, a drow-slayer.

Later on, in the inn, an elf and an orc show up. I discover the orc has a strong grip in his handshake. They have some potions of enlargement for us as there are some Formorian giants helping the drow and they're very mean.

.14.

#### 9th Thaw

It was four days later by the time we arrived at the edge of the slowly expanding dome. Trusty Jack had decided to join us and Lord Ebonhand had also shown up. As we huddled close to the small orray, Kryan did the ritual to activate it and soon we were enclosed in a dark dome which merged with the big one, permitting us easy access.

We sneaked in. A short while later we encountered a group of zombies so we went around. A bit later on there were some Formorians and more undead in the process of constructing something. Again we went around. The roads were warded with some sort of alarm & transport spell but an Earth College Counter suppressed it enough for us to cross.

Occasionally we could hear a 'whooshing' sound from overhead accompanied by a gust of wind. We finally determined that was caused by a moving blacker than black object. Observation told us it was coming past at regular intervals so we concluded it was part of the orray.

Scratch and Naiden went ahead to scout out. When they returned they told us that the city wall had been built up to 30' high but not all of it had been warded. The underground tunnels were heavily warded with Sinking Dooms. So we holed up for the night.

10th Thaw

Went up and over the wall. Beyond were houses, and the streets were occupied by drow, undead and Formorians. Some of the buildings had been rebuilt in the drow style and had faerie lights. None of the drow had house badges. We soon ascertained that these drow had been horror marked and it was self inflicted. Some sort of thought worm according to Scratch.

The citadel in the centre had been rebuilt in black obsidian with a silver inlay. Formorian giants were guarding the main entrances, armed with flails and balls & chains. Here, the 'whooshing' was much more pronounced.

We managed to find a way in via an arrow slit and being conveyed in the cage. Inside was a weapons room so I picked up a well made drow glaive. We then made our way towards the thrumming sound we could hear. In the corridor was a ward containing a distance distortion caused by an earth elemental. Adam managed to control the elemental and the alarm ward was disabled.

Through the door and we were on a balcony overlooking an enormous room, two hundred feet across. Eighty feet from the floor, supported by a large shaft was the central dark sphere of the orray. Drow surrounded the shaft at the bottom and at least 12 Formorians were guarding each of the entrances to this balcony. One was five feet away from us. Trusty Jack advanced to meet it.

.15.

Quicknesses were put up and while Adam put up a wall to block off advancing giants from one side, Trusty finished off his one. Everyone else charged in while Flamis and Neroc tossed spells at the drow below. Scratch made like a spider and crawled along the wall.

One giant toppled off the balcony. Down below, other giants were busy removing the balcony supports. More giants charged us so Turf and Ebonhand went to meet them while Sabrina shot at other formorians with arrows, especially the ones firing large crossbow bolts, the size of small logs, in our direction.

After a while we had to abandon the balcony and headed down to ground level to continue the fight. Kryan shrouded the area in fog. By now most of the drow were dead or fled. Those that survived were coming back with reinforcements.

It was a rather vicious fight. At the beginning, Ebonhand had cast a sunlight and it was starting to get lighter. Also Adam had blocked the entrance. After a while the wall went down. Before he could get another one up, 15 drow and two more formorians got through. Scratch used a reverse gravity to send many of them flying away. I reinforced the wall with one of my own.

Finally the fight inside the area was over. It was nearly full daylight in here now and the undead outside were bursting into flame. More fighting was taking place outside as the army we had requested moved in.

The darksphere was a portal and the base appeared to be metal but was made out of souls. Holy water damaged it and it had an evil taint.

A second sunlight was started. As it got brighter, the giant orray faded until it vanished, only being faintly visible to those with spirit sight. Also the dome overhead dissipated.

Finally the city was retaken and the remaining drow captured or killed. The prince regent was escorted in. As far as the orray was concerned it had faded to another plane and would need to be permanently dealt to in the underground city immediately below it - the one with the undead and the red dragon we had been to. The local priests would need to do some research on it.

As a reward, the prince replaced all the healing potions we had used and arranged to have our armour repaired. He also offered 10,000sp each but we turned it down as we had already collected quite a bit of loot and he would need the money to rebuild.

12 Thaw

We returned to Greyhawk City and, from there, portalled to the Guild. Once we got there, we discovered we hadn't missed the Guild meeting after all.